JAGUAR WOMAN

A NEO-FOLKTALE IN TWO ACTS

By Olga El

Trickster-storyteller, Enitan, guides you through an immersive neo-folktale that observes what happens when corporate greed and religious imperialism threatens a small Quilombo. The colorful citizenry in JAGUAR WOMAN is loosely based on the orixá, traditional West African spiritual forces found all over the diaspora. The community itself is almost another character. The show explores the idea of the "outsider" and the roles that outsiders, including the audience and Enitan's love interest, can play. Based on my 2007 novella of the same name, JAGUAR WOMAN the play (2019 - Present) is commentary on all "Western" culture — including that of the United States — a poignant reminder that the real-world threat of fascism looms even as the borders of reality are blurred by powerful, ancient magic.

NOTE: Dance and music sequences make this play at least 90m. PLEASE READ ALL STAGE DIRECTIONS (they are integral to the plot) and implement them to the best of your ability.

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Cast of Characters (**Doubling OK**).Actors w/ actor-kids A+

Elder Enitan: An elderly villager and trickster-storyteller who directly addresses the audience-tourists the entire show (50+)

Young Enitan Lima: Elder Enitan's down-to-earth younger self who wears clothes similar to Elder Enitan's (18-25)

Tia Adesina: A powerful sorceress and community leader (30-50)

Onçia/Jaguar Woman: A mysterious black-skinned beauty, Enitan's love interest (18-25)

Osei Para-Braga: Enitan's best friend, a flirtatious activist-artist (18-25)

Lucien Da Silva/Joao: Enitan's other best friend, a privileged and intelligent young man (18-25)

Zuna Lima: Enitan's beautiful and sassy sister (18-25)

Nana Zula: Enitan's pragmatic mother and community leader (40-60)

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Mama Zé/Elder Onçia/Elder Tia: An intuitive elder (50+)

Otávio Boseda: An unsentimental community leader (40-50)

Eduard Chinelo/Mestre: A soft-hearted elder healer (50+)

Father Josef Da Costa: Leader of a chapel near the community (60s)

Apollonia Castro-Dias/Henrietta Rodrigues: A proud and religious woman (40-50)

Mariela Rodrigues: A gossipy teen (18-25)

*Ensemble Adults, Children (3 girls,1 boy): **ALL** other characters including aerialists, capoeiristas, etcetera such as DANILO, MARCIA, ABENI, etc. (10+)

Place: In a Brazilian Quilombo Village

Time: The present (frame story); the 80s (main arc)

ACT I

(Two aerialists descend from the ceiling. The male partner in white and yellow, and the female in black and purple, interact in a dramatic dance. Cool colors and dramatic lighting flood the stage. Cosmic video art is projected onto the background. Ethereal Afro-Native music fills the soundscape.)

ELDER ENITAN
(**VOICE OVER/FROM OFFSTAGE**)
The Indios used to say: *The jaguar stalks the sun all day and swallows it up at dusk, filling the night sky with its beautiful spotted coat. Each morning the sun is reborn from her inexhaustible womb. The darkness from which all things are born is the same darkness to which all things return when they are finished. Only jaguar has the courage to lead the souls through the underworld so they may return anew like the golden sun. In the shadows, the jaguar will wait until it is time to consume the world. When the jaguar feeds for the last time it will cause the end of days.*

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(Aerialists land on the stage and dance Samba. Carnivale participants come from various corners of the theater shouting and dancing. They interact with the audience, run on stage, and continue to dance. Warm, full lighting floods in. Carnivale music is played by musicians on the stage. An old man, ELDER ENITAN the storyteller, sits slightly off-center at the edge of the stage. He stands and walks DR.)

ELDER ENITAN
I could tell you a story about the time Abeni Vasconcelos put a spell on Danilo to make him fall in love with her.

(ABENI VASCONCELOS steps out from the carnivale crowd, leading DANILO AMBROSIO-LOPES by the chin with her pointer finger. As they dance she playfully, then more seriously swats him away.)

ELDER ENITAN
It took a week for Abeni to decide that she did not desire Danilo's love after all and, when he found out, he stormed around like a wild bull for days, breaking everything in his path.

(DANILO AMBROSIO-LOPES pulls on an extravagant carnivale hood with horns.)

ELDER ENITAN
He scared Abeni and the rest of us so bad that we locked ourselves up in our houses and refused to go to work or let the children play outside.

(DANILO AMBROSIO-LOPES chases the other revelers who play along in mock fear, continuing to dance.)

ELDER ENITAN
It was Tia Adesina who brought order by slapping sense back into Danilo with her cane. It was the same cane she used to whip Abeni until her ass was as blue as the river.

(TIA ADESINA emerges, in an elaborate white and purple carnivale dress and exaggerated sparkly cane, and chases the duo back into the crowd.)

ELDER ENITAN
I could tell you about the time Samra El-Habib accidentally made love to a wolf in the guise of a handsome, white man from the city.

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(SAMRA EL-HABIB emerges from the crowd with a man carrying a bombastic wolf prop over his head, they dance.)

ELDER ENITAN
She gave birth to a furry infant with pointed ears and silver-moon eyes and the wolf-man retreated to the forest, carrying his tail between his legs, never to be seen again.

(A child appears and chases SAMRA EL-HABIB, who chases the wolf-man back into the crowd.)

ELDER ENITAN
Or maybe you want to hear about the day José Delgado Leontes Aurelio Lopes-Lopez had to defeat all the Capoeristas in the village before he could marry Marcia, Danilo's sister, the Mestre's daughter.

(Berimbaus feature in the music more heavily as the tempo of the music gains speed, singers sing a Capoeira corrido, as the crowd moves into a semi-circle open to

the audience. JOSÉ LEONTES emerges holding hands with MARCIA. He meets his first challenger and a series of quick fight-games ensues; JOSÉ LEONTES fighting challenger after male challenger. He eventually fights DANILO AMBROSIO-LOPES, THE MESTRE, and then his future wife MARCIA-emphasis on the game with MARCIA. When the game is over he kisses his wife and the crowd throws confetti eventually morphing back into a generic carnivale crowd. Music resumes as regular carnivale music.)

ELDER ENITAN
But that's not why you're here. You are here because she allowed you, because she called you. I'm talking about the Jaguar Woman and it is her story that I am going to tell.

(The crowd slowly stops dancing. Music comes to a halt.)

ELDER ENITAN
For a complete story, I will have to tell you about the children who disappeared.

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(Lighting turns cool and dramatic, rain and wind effects are launched. A crying child runs before the crowd and a woman runs out to catch him and carries him away. The partyers duck the "rain.")

ELDER ENITAN
You will have to know about the storm that was fiercer than the rains on Tia Adesina's death day.

(Partyers scatter. Rain/wind effects become more intense.)

ELDER ENITAN
You must know of stolen lands and stinging poverty. Angry spirits, ancestral wrath. Grave injustices to Black skin both blessed by nature and cursed by man.

(Partyers wail or take cover.)

ELDER ENITAN
You must understand why everyone here reveres the jaguar... But, first a cigar.

(ELDER ENITAN takes out a small box of cigars and holds it out as if offering to the audience. He shrugs when no one accepts his offer, takes out a cigar and clips, lights, and smokes it. He sits in a chair DR. Rain/Wind effects cease. Lighting turns calm and warm. The partyers are relieved and/or reassemble on the stage. They compose themselves and shed carnivale costuming and props. Transition into a normal village scene.)

ELDER ENITAN
Your intellectuals will tell you that our stories are myths; that our spirits are symbols, archetypes.
(**Smokes cigar**)
This doesn't change the fact that the curupira will chase away hunters with his backwards feet or that Mãe D'água can make a man throw himself, willingly, into the sea. Magic is real, stranger. It will kick your ass.
(**Smokes cigar**)
I am not a storyteller. I am a historian, a chronicler of events. You could have picked anyone in this village to tell you a story but you chose me. That was a wise decision. I have a Ph.D. in this shit.
(**Smokes cigar**)
And the others will try to deceive you. Understand, they are trying to protect the remnants of something sacred. But me? I got no secrets. I will always tell you the truth. Tia Adesina has died.

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(ELDER TIA enters from DR/RC + spot on ELDER TIA in white. Lights on the rest of the scene dim except for light on ELDER ENITAN and ELDER TIA. Villagers, who are also wearing white, slowly walk to surround ELDER TIA as she moves C/DC. Other villagers turn to look but then remain frozen. Occasionally there is a flash of "lightning.")

ELDER ENITAN
Tia was a matriarch, the spiritual god-mother of this village. She had no children of her own, but her love for each of us rivaled that of our own mothers.

(Children run to hug ELDER TIA.)

ELDER ENITAN
The day the lightning took Tia Adesina's life she was busy, cutting her hands up in the sugarcane fields.

(ELDER TIA, facing the audience, slowly begins to fall back as villagers catch her and, eventually/slowly, carry her offstage as if carrying a coffin.)

ELDER ENITAN
We found her face down in the mud. Her overworked body was hard and cold like stone, as we lifted her from the earth. Her feet, her ancient black hands, as rough as granite. But a smile was chiseled in the corners of her lips-she knew. The dark mother had finally reclaimed her. It is what she wanted. We buried her facing the east to make it easier for her to go home.

(Once ELDER TIA is offstage, full lights back up on village scene and action in the background resumes as normal with soft, upbeat music playing.)

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ELDER ENITAN
If you wanted to settle a quarrel with a neighbor, you went to Tia. If you wanted a warm meal, you went to Tia. If you wanted to be pregnant, you went to Tia. If you didn't want to be pregnant, you went to Tia. We are taking this week off in her honor. You came at a good time-there's lots of food.

(Village women appear in the audience and offer fruit as ELDER ENITAN smokes his cigar.)

ELDER ENITAN
Tia Adesina is the one who called the Jaguar Woman. Now ask me why in the hell would she do that.
(**Smokes cigar**)
Well, I'll tell you. The story starts almost forty years ago. Brancos from the city came to steal this land. My ancestors' land. Every day, we pay homage to Mongo Izegbe, the first leader of the quilombo where this village stands today. To his lover, Desidéria Gonçalves, the Portuguese daughter who helped plan the escape from the fazenda with her father's horses and guns.

(GIRL # 1 and BOY # 1 run around the stage, giggling, holding hands.)

ELDER ENITAN
To her mulatta sisters who drugged the slave master and his sons so they would awake in the morning to an empty plantation.

(Villagers come out in a procession carrying candles, statuettes, and paintings of their ancestors and other spiritual figures. They walk from one corner of the stage to another.)

ELDER ENITAN
To the natives of this land, displaced and decimated by conquistadors, who helped the slaves navigate and survive in the jungle.

(More children come play, fighting each other with fake weapons.)

ELDER ENITAN
To Ogunsanwo, a general in the battle against the pursuing Portuguese, who spared the life of the slave master and his sons. To Una, the indígenas priestess, who called the rain and fog to keep the Portuguese from pursuing again; who dreamt of this place as the spot to settle. And the brancos came to steal this land. Built their farms right over there, over our graveyard.

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(ELDER ENITAN points offstage. BLACKOUT except on "Nana's Kitchen" LC. An actress in her forties portrays a younger TIA ADESINA. Village elders EDUARD CHINELO, MAMA ZÉ, NANA ZULA, OTÁVIO BOSEDA are also present.)

TIA ADESINA
Their cows and workers are going to keep dying. Ha! What did they think would happen when they disturb the dead to build their farm?

OTÁVIO BOSEDA
Danilo has been hunting the yaguara for weeks. What if it comes for our cattle or US next? If the rain doesn't drown us first.

NANA ZULA
And what about the children? Joao has been missing for days and it's been raining since he disappeared. Luna's mother said she didn't come home last night. The rain is a sign. Those brancos aren't the only ones being cursed.

EDUARD CHINELO
Ancestors and orixas need to be placated. This is the time for ritual and prayer.

TIA ADESINA
This is the time to run those brancos off our land. We should have never allowed them to settle in the first place.

OTÁVIO BOSEDA
And who will make them leave? You? With all the money and guns you don't have? Joao is a young man. He's gone off on his own before…

MAMA ZÉ
Not like this. Something isn't right.

EDUARD CHINELO
When Zé feels something isn't right, it isn't.

TIA ADESINA
I wouldn't be surprised if those brancos snatched them up and sold them off like they do everything else.

OTÁVIO BOSEDA
Luna is a beautiful young woman. Every girl her age has eyes for Joao. I saw Joao and Luna flirting not too long ago. I'm not surprised they are missing.

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TIA ADESINA
Tell that to the parents who are sick with worry. Ever since you re-married, your prideful logic has gagged the voice of spirit. How much money do you inherit when the old widow dies, Boseda?

OTÁVIO BOSEDA
You are ferocious as usual, Adesina. Should we all go crazy over what is probably the fervor of youth and the temptation of love? When Joao breaks Luna's heart they'll be back.

NANA ZULA
Everyone listen. This quilombo has stood for centuries. It is not the first time we have fought off attacks and it won't be the last. But if we attack our own we are lost.

(BLACKOUT on Nana's Kitchen scene. Light goes up on ELDER ENITAN DR.)

ELDER ENITAN
Little Joao Barbosa and Luna Sousa. Their ages combined didn't add up to a full life. Police reports fell on deaf ears and idle hands, particularly when it came to two Black, Quilombola children. And the storm only got worse. Fierce winds beat down our rooftops. The rain hit us like bullets. Lightning shot down the trees. We closed our shops,

abandoned our fields, prayed for mercy, and nothing helped. But on the ninth day of that storm, Tia Adesina had had enough.

(Lights up on "Tia's Cabana". TIA ADESINA is standing by an oven. As ELDER ENITAN speaks she opens the oven, carefully takes out a pastry, wraps it in red cloth, and puts it in a basket. She begins to walk DC with the basket.)

ELDER ENITAN
Tia Adesina lived alone in her cabana on the edge of the village. It was there that she appealed to Oya-Iansa, the orixa of storms and revolutions. She made magic dough and filled it with sweetened cacao, the pulp of the purple maracuja, and three drops of blood from her own unborn child. She molded the pastry into the shape of an infant and set it in her oven to bake. When it was finished, she wrapped the pastry in blood-red swaddling and placed it in a basket.

(TIA ADESINA should be DC with the basket before ELDER ENITAN continues. Facing the audience, she sets the basket down on the floor and kneels before it as if praying. She begins speaking in Yoruba. After a few seconds, ELDER ENITAN begins to speak, overlapping her words by translating into English.)

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ELDER ENITAN
Over it she incanted, in her Yoruba mother tongue: *Eepa! Oya! She-jaguar, Queen of the Jungle! Your passionate dance kicks up dust as you swirl. Cattle and trees are lost to the winds. The crack of your whip is the thunder and you spit red fire, white lightning. The floods are tears from your laughter. But where is the rainbow that you also control? You are the keeper of witches. You are the guide of the dead. You can take men's fortunes in the marketplace. Human affairs are of no consequence. But can you, Oya, in all your greatness build a village with such puny human hands? Can you, with all your wisdom, comprehend the childless mother's grief? Could you, with all your passion, suffer the agony of the slave's welted spine? No, Iansa, you could never know such misery.*

(TIA ADESINA rises, leaving the basket in place on the floor. Lights go down on ELDER ENITAN. Lights remain on TIA and go up center stage with occasional

flashes of "lightning". Her eyes are closed as she begins to sway. She holds her head and backs away to center stage as if a woman possessed. She launches herself into a dance - a fusion of contemporary dance and Afro-Brazilian dance and ritual. The musicians play a song based on Iansa dedications. The music and dance builds in intensity toward the end until she drops. With music and dance over, BLACKOUT on center stage. Lights back up on ELDER ENITAN.)

ELDER ENITAN
That night, Tia Adesina left the basket by the gates of the village and returned home. By the next morning the storm had passed, but the sun lay under a thick blanket of fog. When Tia Adesina returned to the gates, she found an empty basket.

(Full lights up on chattering crowd, all facing stage R.)

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ELDER ENITAN
I had gotten up early that morning to assess the damage from the storm. A crowd was gathering by the gate, preoccupied by something coming from the direction of the river. Out of curiosity I joined them. Then, I saw it too.

(ELDER ENITAN looks to the crowd as lights switch to blacklight/violet. The JAGUAR WOMAN walks into the crowd from stage right, wrapped in blood-red cloth, the same as the pastry swaddling. The chattering goes quiet as the crowd forms a semi-circle around her, open to the audience. JAGUAR WOMAN faces the audience. Her eyes glow green via black light lenses. TIA ADESINA steps toward JAGUAR WOMAN to confront her.)

TIA ADESINA
Who are you? Why do you come to our village?

JAGUAR WOMAN
Mother, I have come because you called me.

(Gasps and whispers reverberate throughout the crowd.)

JAGUAR WOMAN
Poison has been seeded within the ground here. If poison is allowed to grow, your children will reap death.

(The incoherent whispers turn to louder, panicked snippets of confused dialogue.)

TIA ADESINA
What do you know about the children?!

JAGUAR WOMAN
The smell of blood is already on the wind.

HENRIETTA RODRIGUES
Enough riddles!

DANILO AMBROSIO-LOPES
Who are you? How do we know that you speak the truth?

JAGUAR WOMAN
I have many names, some call me la tigra. Within nine new moons you will see how my words are true.

(JAGUAR WOMAN falls at the priestess's feet. BLACKOUT.

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